

In re Patent Application of:
TORRES ET AL.
Serial No. 09/774,393
Filed: JANUARY 31, 2001

In the Specification:

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 16,
line 9, as follows:

As illustrated in Fig.7, the distributing means 39 can include a distribution device 60 having an outer surface portion 62. The distribution device can advantageously be positioned in a public location, e.g., a convenience store, grocery store, or public library and can also be positioned at the location of each of the plurality of physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56. The distribution device 60 can be characterized as a vending machine as understood by those skilled in the art. The distribution device 60 includes purchasing means 64 for purchasing at least one of the plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers 20 positioned therein. The purchasing means 64 includes a payment device 68. The payment device 68 can include a device that recognizes currency, such as dollar bills and coins for example, and can also include a device that is responsive to credit and debit cards for payment of at least one prepaid healthcare patient identifier 20. Once the payment device 68 accepts a predetermined payment as recognition for payment for the at least one prepaid healthcare patient identifier 20, the distribution device 60 dispenses the at least one prepaid healthcare patient identifier 20.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 17,
line 14, as follows:

As best illustrated in Fig. 4, a second embodiment of the present invention provides a prepaid healthcare service system 10' including a server 80' having a database 82'

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including data related to a plurality of patients 40 and a plurality of physicians 50 in a network of physicians 56. The prepaid healthcare service system 10' also advantageously includes a communications network 84' positioned to be in communication with the server 80'. The prepaid healthcare service system further includes a plurality of computers 86' positioned to be in communication with the communications network 84' including a user interface responsive to a user U. The system still further includes purchasing means ~~64'~~ for purchasing a plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations with the plurality of physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56 and prepaid healthcare updating means 32' for updating information regarding each of the plurality of patients 40. Both the updating means 32' and the purchasing means ~~64'~~ are positioned on the server 80'.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 18, line 29, as follows:

The purchasing means ~~64~~ positioned on the server 80' can advantageously include a purchaser 67'. A patient 40 or user U that accesses the server 80' through one of the plurality of computers 86' positioned to be in communication with the communications network 84', can advantageously purchase a plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers 20' using the purchaser ~~64'~~ 67'. Each of the plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers 20' includes a preselected number of prepaid healthcare consultations associated therewith. Each one of the prepaid healthcare patient identifiers 20' can include a card 22' having a flexible body. Each of the plurality of cards 22' includes patient identification means 23' positioned on a surface of

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the flexible body of the card 22' that can advantageously be used to identify each of the plurality of patients 40 participating in the prepaid healthcare service system 10'. Each of the plurality of cards 22' also includes medical network identification means 37' positioned on the flexible body for identifying the network of physicians 56 providing the plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations to the plurality of patients 40. The patient identification means 23' positioned on each of the plurality of patient identification cards 22' advantageously makes each of the plurality of cards 22' unique to each of the plurality of patients 40. Further the patient identification means 23' advantageously simplifies the process for each of the physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56 to identify each of the plurality of patients 40 as being members in the prepaid healthcare service system 10'.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 20, line 18, as follows:

The prepaid healthcare service system further includes recharging means ~~90'~~ positioned on the server 80' and responsive to each of the plurality of patients 40 and each of the plurality of physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56. The recharging means ~~90'~~ includes a recharger 91', as perhaps best illustrated in Fig. 4, for purchasing additional prepaid healthcare consultations. When each of the plurality of patients 40 are informed that the remaining number of prepaid healthcare consultations is equal to or less than the predetermined number, the recharger 91' advantageously allows each of the plurality of patients 40 an avenue to recharge or replenish the amount of prepaid healthcare consultations

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associated with the patient identifier 20' without the need to purchase a new patient identifier 20'. This also advantageously reduces the waste associated with providing additional patient identifiers 20' every time the patients 40 purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations. The recharger 91' can also advantageously be configured to automatically replenish the number of prepaid healthcare consultations when the remaining number of prepaid healthcare consultations is equal to or less than the predetermined number. This advantageously eliminates some of the burden on the patient to purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 21, line 24, as follows:

The prepaid healthcare service system can also advantageously include a plurality of telephones 35' positioned to be in communication with the communications network 34'. Each of the plurality of patients 40 can use a predetermined combination of numbers 36' on each of the plurality of telephones 35' to access the database 82' on the server 80' to thereby perform various functions, such as activate patient identifiers 20', recharge prepaid healthcare consultations, update patient information, or any other number of functions 150. This advantageously allows patients 40 and physicians 50 that may not have access to a computer 86' to still participate in the prepaid healthcare service system 10' regardless of whether or not access to a computer 86' is available. For example, one may use a cellular telephone, or any other type of wireless communicator, to communicate with

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the server 80' and thereby perform any number of a variety of functions of the prepaid healthcare service system 10'.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 22, line 10, as follows:

As illustrated in Fig. 9, the present invention also advantageously includes methods of providing 95 a prepaid healthcare service system 10. The method includes the step of purchasing 100 a prepaid healthcare patient identifier 20. The method also includes the step of distributing 105 a plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers 20 having a preselected number of prepaid healthcare consultations associated therewith to a plurality of patients 40. The prepaid healthcare consultations take place between one of a plurality of physicians 50 in a network of physicians 56 and one of the plurality of patients 40. After the patient 40 purchases and receives the patient identifier 20, the patient activates 115 the patient identifier 20. The step of activating 115 the patient identifier 20 requires a verification process to determine if each of the plurality of patient identifiers 20 are valid. After the step of activating 115 the patient identifier 20 is completed, the patient 40 determines whether healthcare services are necessary 117. If the patient 40 determines that healthcare services are necessary 117, the patient 40 proceeds to the step of identifying 110 at least one of the plurality of physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56 to provide at least one of the plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations to one of the plurality of patients 40. After the patient 40 identifies the physician 50 in the network of physicians 56,

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the patient visits 118 the physician 50, and presents 120 the patient identifier 20 to thereby obtain a healthcare consultation 140. The method of distributing patient identifiers to each of the plurality of patients 40 advantageously allows each of the plurality of physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56 to identify each of the plurality of patients 40 as members in the prepaid healthcare service system 10.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 29, line 26, as follows:

The method of providing the plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations still further includes the step of recharging 135 at least one of the plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers 20' by purchasing additional prepaid healthcare consultations. The step of recharging 115 advantageously allows each of the plurality of patients 40 to purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations independently of a sales person or a healthcare representative. This also advantageously provides each of the plurality of patients 40 the freedom to purchase as many or as few prepaid healthcare consultations as desired. The method further advantageously allows each of the plurality of patients the opportunity to purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations when necessary, regardless of the present number of prepaid healthcare consultations remaining. For example, if the patient only gets paid once a month and, as a precaution, desires to purchase the prepaid healthcare consultations, regardless of the present need, the patient is free to do so by accessing the recharger 91' positioned on the server 80' and purchasing additional prepaid healthcare

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consultations. Each of the plurality of patients 40 and each of the plurality of physicians 50 can also advantageously access 150 the recharger 91' positioned on the server using a telephone 35' that is positioned in communication with the communications network 84'. This advantageously eliminates the need for a computer 86'. The technology available in wireless communication, i.e., cellular telephones, provide each of the plurality of patients 40 and each of the plurality of physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56 access to the recharger 91' wherever telephone service or wireless communication service is available 150.